

Manage stress through exercise, diet

Stress, exercise and diet are intimately connected. Because of this connection, when you lose control in one area, the other two areas are affected. Similarly, making improvements in your diet, exercise or stress-management skills will boost the other areas.

Stress affects diet and fitness

Stress affects the way you eat. You may respond to stress by experiencing a loss of appetite; overeating; eating too much of high-fat, sugary or salty food to soothe your discomfort; or overindulging in alcohol, caffeine or cigarettes.

Stress affects your physical fitness. You may respond to stress by feeling fatigued and exercising less. Stress-related muscle tension may lead to poor posture.

Diet and exercise can affect your stress response in the following ways:

- High blood pressure from inappropriate eating makes you tense.
- Too much caffeine makes you more jittery.
- Cigarettes raise your blood pressure.
- Lack of exercise raises your stress hormone level and lowers pleasure hormones.

Reverse the effects of stress

You can alleviate or reverse the effects of stress by adopting healthy dietary habits.

- Eat a good breakfast every morning.
- When the urge to grab a candy bar strikes, take a walk instead.
- Instead of high-salt or sugary snacks, eat an orange, section by section, and focus on the flavor, aroma and color of the fruit.

You can alleviate or reverse the effects of stress by exercising.

- When the stress level gets high, stop what you are doing and take a brisk walk around the building, house or block.
- Get involved in a regular exercise program.
- Take periodic, five-minute stretch breaks from work.
- Give yourself a shoulder massage.

You can reduce your stress level directly.

- Take a 20-minute break and practicing creative visualization
- Make a list of what is bothering you and correct one problem immediately.
- Practice deep breathing every day. ■